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ABSTRACT

Unfavorable world and national economic and social trends of recent years have been paralleled by a reduced commitment to social services for marginalized peoples, including educational programs for women inmates. The potential negative results for future levels of delinquency and crime cannot be precisely calculated, according to sociologists and criminologists. Ideally, everyone should have equality of access to educational programs to prepare them for a role in a democratic society; however, women and minorities hold the least power in a capitalist, free-market climate, and thus are most easily marginalized and ignored. This paper proposes that educational policy for women's institutions in a time of global restructuring take into consideration the political and economic realities while also fulfilling educational goals of empowerment and entitlement within society. Contains 18 references. (Author/BT)

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Marginal Maidens and Educational Policy for Women's Institutions.

by Kathleen M. Connor

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By: Kathleen M. Connor

Unfavorable world and national economic and social trends of recent years have been paralleled by a reduced commitment to social services for marginalized peoples, including educational programs for women inmates. The potential negative results for future levels of delinquency and crime cannot be precisely calculated, according to sociologists and criminologists. Ideally, everyone should have equality of access to educational programs to prepare them for a role in a democratic society. However, women and minorities hold the least power in a capitalist, free-market climate, and thus are most easily marginalized and ignored. In this paper, I propose that educational policy for women's institutions in a time of global restructuring take into consideration the political and economic realities while also fulfilling educational goals of empowerment and entitlement within society.

Submitted by:
Kathleen M. Connor
March 1997
For Graduate Student Conference "Educating in Global Times: Race, Class, Gender" at University of Alberta, Edmonton

Marginal Maidens and Educational Policy for Women's Institutions

Introduction

"May you live in interesting times" has been an old Gaelic benediction, bestowed on friends and enemies alike. In 1997, going into the new millenium, it seems more a preoccupation that we live in uncertain and unsettling times. Much of this uncertainty accompanies the global restructuring process which affects the economics and politics of the existing world order. Economic restructuring at the national level in North American countries (Canada and the U.S.) has had implications for feminist gains and the social welfare state (Brodie 1995). In particular, the cutbacks projected in the realm of social welfare areas, including educational policy and practice in women's correctional institutions will, if unchecked and unanalyzed for long-term implications, have further negative impact on the already marginalized maidens, women in conflict with the law.

Selected overview of gender, cultural, and educational issues for women in conflict with the law

"Female inmates are young, disproportionately minority-group members, unmarried, undereducated and underemployed. Significant numbers were at-risk children, products of broken homes, and the welfare system; over half had received welfare

sometime during their adult lives" (Senna & Segal, 1996, p. 651).

Before 1960, compared to today, few women were in prison in the United States and Canada. Involvement in crime leading to incarceration was almost unheard of for the 'gentler sex'. Women criminals were notorious women indeed! From 1930-1950, there were four institutions for women, increasing to 34 during the 1980s (Senna & Segal, 1996, p. 649). In a post-World War II, Fordian economy and society, deviant women could be treated kindly, and paternally, with rehabilitation as the goal. What are the factors which have led to prisons for women as a growing institutional phenomenon in traditionally liberal-democratic societies such as Canada and the U.S.? One line of explanation which has been embraced by a number of sociologists and criminologists conversant with legal and political trends is that judges are more willing to sentence women. Another reality is that women are committing more crimes. Some sociologists look at these two situations as a spin-off or backlash of the gains made by the women's liberation movement; that women are behaving and being treated more like their criminal male counterparts (Simon and Landis 1991). In the present era of global restructuring and a post-Fordist economy, there is less tolerance of deviation from the norm. Prisons, both in general and for women in particular, are most definitely a growth industry.

Female inmates, as persons on the margins of society, are identified by characteristics which lie outside the desired socio-cultural norms established by Judeo-Christian, Anglo lawmakers. Furthermore, they are considered to be outside the norm of femininity, having transgressed expectations of what it is to be a woman (Leonard 1982). The ideological factors surrounding the apprehension and incarceration of the 'rogue woman' cannot, in reality, be minimalized or separated from the legal aspects of social

control. The rogue woman has been celebrated in literary and popular culture worldwide, and she encompasses famous figures and images/icons such as Moll Flanders, Bonnie (of Bonnie and Clyde), the East Indian bandit queen Phoolan Devi, and the Mayflower Madam. There are countless others, of every nationality and age. All are women who have stepped outside the bounds of prescribed gender behavior, whether criminally or otherwise. Liberal democratic societies founded on male-oriented and male-conceived principles of law and order are just not really certain how to deal with 'bad girls'. Thus, women who resort to criminal behavior are marginalized by their dangerous aura. Karlene Faith, a well-known academic who has researched women's prisons, finds that a female who deviates from socially-prescribed behavior is deemed "More deviant than her male equivalent," suffering greater social stigmatization than men when "She breaches the idealized gender standards" which are passivity, submission and obedience (1996, p. 70). This reading is, of course, a very feminist perspective on who goes to prison and why, but one which has merit given the depth of Faith's scholarship and research on women in prison.

Establishment of a recognizable set of values and laws are necessary for society to function, but we do need also to admit and recognize that these values and laws will not come naturally to all members. Therein lies the question of should offenders be penalized or should they be re-educated; and can the individual be redeemed through educative measures? The liberal, benign society of the not-so-distant past said ' re-educate", feeling it had the resources and moral responsibility to do so. The repressive, neoconservative, constricted society under formation today says "lock them up and let them rot". Thus, the societies of the information age can enter the global economy freed

of the dead weight of marginal people. It approximates the perfect solution in that the prison industry is a major employer, for construction, personnel and services; the people who cause problems are contained; and those people who can contribute to society are free to rise to their functional positions to out-maneuver competitors in the international, electronic economic arena.

Women of minority groups

Women of minority groups who commit crimes are doubly marginalized in North American society. In the recent inquiry into alleged Corrections misconduct at the Kingston Prison for Women (P4W), a document researched by members of a Commission of Inquiry under Justice Louise Arbour (1996) includes a heading titled "Section 5.2.5 'Cultural insensitivity and minority women' " outlining the fact that aboriginal women are subject to racist enactments of law both inside and out of prison. Some of the research commission's pronouncements platformed from information contained in the 1967 Canada Corrections Indians and the Law report which identified "the government's insensitivity to the particular circumstances and problems of Aboriginal women, and raised public awareness of racism in criminal justice institutions" (p. 247). The more recent document from the P4W inquiry also generally acknowledges that the needs of culturally diverse groups are passed over and/or are not understood.

According to Faith (1993) the disproportionate representation of aboriginal women in the justice system occurs due to charges of disorderly conduct, non-payment of fines and other minor offenses. These are charges which white, educated, middle-class women can get dismissed. Aboriginal women with a family or personal history of conflict

with the law may be hostile or intimidated when they face arrest and imprisonment. They often do not have the will, support or legal or cultural resources to defend themselves, and accept unfavorable plea bargains because they don't know what to do (Faith 1993). Once they enter the justice system, native women, and women in general, are subject to male-based norms and rules which are inadequate for and in many ways recognized as alien to their needs (Pate 1994:61).

Beth Richie (1996) proposes the concept of "gender entrapment" as the explanation for many African-American women inmates. Her analysis is based on 37 life histories of women in the Rose M. Singer Center at Rikers. Two thousand women reside there, of whom 50% are black, and most of the other 50% are women of color. She talked to African-American women who were physically and emotionally abused by their partners; not all were low-income or underprivileged, but some of the women came from relatively privileged backgrounds. The predominant device of the "gender entrapment" was found in the societal expectations the women felt they must live up to: to be outwardly a good wife, mother and woman in general even as she betrayed herself by continuing in an abusive, exploitative relationship with a male partner. Richie contends that the social safety nets of women's support services were not viable for black women, but are more accessible and accepted by white women.

Here again, with these battered black women, the image of the 'rogue woman' comes into play, as, pushed to the brink of endurance by unimaginable violence in their lives, they were received into the 'justice system' as scapegoats because "They deserved it and need to be punished" (Richie 1996, p.2). Some women killed abusive partners, others committed crimes for their partner and ended up taking the rap; others committed

crimes (drugs, prostitution) as a means of escape. These women were marginalized and isolated, imprisoned within "The social context of an unresponsive social service system, a mean spirited and repressive public welfare agenda, increasingly aggressive law enforcement policies, and growing social intolerance for *women who cannot or do not 'fit in' to dominant society*" (Richie 1996, p. 5, emphasis mine).

Role of education in women's prisons

Senna and Segal (1996) note the two categories of vocational and academic studies which may be available to inmates. Vocational skills learning is more prevalent, but highschool upgrading and college courses are available at some institutions, and sometimes through distance education. Vocational education is generally non-controversial, encompassing on-the-job training in services which can be marketed to the outside, generating revenue for the prison operations and a little money for participating inmates. Vocational training for prisoners mirrors what the upright citizenry who are not in prison approve of as preparation or readiness for employment. Highschool studies, resulting in a GED, are viewed benignly, as highschool certification is the minimum requirement for many jobs. Academic studies are more controversial and apt to be cut.. Academic studies are seen as a waste of money, and create what law-abiding citizens fear will be a smart class of cons.

Prison educators themselves see education for inmates as a constructive use of time, keeping inmates busy and motivated (Personal interviews with three prison educators, 1996, Edmonton); and the inmates themselves seem to have a positive attitude to having the opportunity to learn, to fill up time, and to focus on goals for the future

(Personal observations and conversations with inmates in education program, Edmonton P4W, April 1996). In general, education for inmates is considered helpful, and an effective means to avoid recidivism (Senna & Segal 1996) through a partial adaptation and acceptance of societal mores and values.

One may ask, who are these women who need to be educated while in prison, and why did they not receive the appropriate education on the outside? I have argued the idea that many of the women have been marginalized in society. This marginalization in many cases extended to their educational access. For numerous social and personal reasons, the normal education, prescribed in North America as K through Grade 12, or at least mandated until Grade 9, may have been disrupted. These reasons for disruption of education were likely gender and/or culturally related. Thus, functionality in society (literacy, budgeting skills) may be a need. Tessa West is a researcher and advocate for women's literacy education in prison who feels that education does contribute to less recidivism. Many women in prisons worldwide need only basic literacy to improve their lives (West 1994). She has found that, internationally, women have fallen through the cracks of society in their early education due to family problems and negative school experiences.

A second need which may be met through education of women inmates is to raise their self-esteem through achievement in a realm which was previously overlooked or denied them. Often women did not continue in their basic education because they were told, by families or educators, that they were too stupid to learn, or were told that they didn't need education. A third need is the need for empowerment of the women, partially through the functional skills and the raising of self-esteem, but also through an

ability to name the socio-cultural reasons why they landed in prison and how to discover what are their options and choices for the future. The first need evokes little opposition from the neoconservative governments who will continue to fund vocational programs and some basic literacy training in spite of cutbacks. The second and third needs are not seen as being in the best interests of rule and control of the citizenry, and a streamlined entry into the competitive global markets which are geared toward monetary outcome rather than quality of life (Mander & Goldsmith 1996).

Educational programs and policies in prisons for women in the era of cutbacks

Current economic restructuring is rooted in neoconservative and neoliberal ideology, where a free-market approach is paramount, replacing the 'soft' social welfare approach. In a time of economic restructuring and uncertainty, an obvious place to make cutbacks, in a short-term fiscal outlook rationale, is in areas where money is not well-utilized. In a neoconservative, back-to-the-basics climate, criminal transgressors do not deserve more than the standard requirements of food, clothing and shelter. As non-productive members of society, indeed as failures, money spent with only the possibility of making them productive is fiscally irresponsible. Policy makers and government management officials, rather than allocating funds for preventative and rehabilitative programs, view prisons as a growth industry, intersecting with the global economy more effectively. Economic growth figures can be presented in the global marketplace for materials used to construct and maintain prisons, and in the numbers of people employed to build, maintain and staff them. Prisons as a growth industry is also presented as a

more efficient response to crime. There are more jails and prisons in which to place criminals, protecting the citizenry and showing that, in the new society, there is zero tolerance for transgression.

The Edmonton Journal (Feb. 29, 1996, p. A7) reported that privatization of Alberta jails was ruled out by the Justice Minister, Brian Evans because the prison staff had come up with enough cost-saving recommendations to save two million dollars. Among their ideas were to make cuts to education programs. Educational programs can be expensive, and so the concept of "less eligibility" comes into play, that is, the idea that prisoners should be treated less well than the law-abiding citizen. It includes the idea of why should criminals receive free education when non-criminals must pay, through tuition or taxes (Senna & Segal 1996). The argument of less eligibility is very strongly used to deride the perceived "country club" atmosphere of progressively designed women's prisons such as the new EPW. It is this concept of "less eligibility", particularly for the demonized, marginalized, "rogue woman" which fed much of the media frenzy from April through June 1996 in the Edmonton Journal in regard to escapes of women inmates and the supposed "soft" treatment of offenders incarcerated at the EPW.

Perhaps a fatal flaw in economic restructuring is the idea, that to reduce debt, a cutback in *all* areas of expenditure, including in the area of domestic, social program expenses such as prison education programs, is justified in the attempt to reverse deficit accounts. This universal cutbacks approach presumes an interchangibility between macroeconomic and microeconomic processes, or maybe more accurately, what anthropologists term a "sympathetic magic" effect whereby a cutback or debt-repayment program in the global arena will also work in the domestic sphere. It is a tactical mistake

to attempt to imbue domestic cutbacks with the ability to make a difference in Canada's or the U.S.'s international debt accounts. It is clear that macroeconomics, or the global accountancy and position of the power and influence of the U.S. should be taken care of with, for example, 'debt equity' swaps between Japan and the U.S. (Cohen 1993). In order to enter the global economic arena, North Americans need not feel compelled or required to abandon their social safety net programs. Indeed, it would be really short-sighted to ignore the presence of potentially productive human capital, and to perpetuate the miseries of an underclass that may eventually revolt, a prediction made by Goldsmith (1996).

Direction for educational policies in prisons in a time of global restructuring

Since global restructuring is rapidly replacing the welfare state with free-market oriented policies, it is paramount to understand and reflect on how prison educational programs, coming from the liberal philosophy, can adapt to the new society without abandoning criminals or further marginalizing them.

Ross and Trachte (1990) argue that global markets and global restructuring have changed the balance of social, economic and political power from the "Old Leviathan" which was "Jealous of all centers of competing authority" (the imperialistic nation-state model), to the "New Leviathan" which "Welcomes all variation in social conditions, for it uses the uneven development of the regions of the global economy as a lever to bargain with each unit of government for the most profitable conditions of global production."

(p. 3). Ross and Trachte propose that the new era of global capitalism began in the late 1960s, with the creation of a global orientation to manufacturing in low cost "periphery" (Third World) areas, and now transferable to any place, creating a global pool of labor where "Competitive pressure disciplines labor and capital" (p. 6). Significantly changed from the traditional monopoly capitalism philosophy, the global economy promotes a more democratic exploitation of people and resources. The economic insecurity which accompanies corporate downsizing, plant closures, Wal-Mart vs. the locally-owned general store, and the like becomes the new 'policing' agent in the economy.

A Modest Proposal for the Gainful Education of Women Inmates (with apologies to Jonathan Swift)

Paul Kennedy (1993) discusses the role of education and the position of women in world societies. He points out that social thinkers such as Wells and Toynbee have said that the reeducation of humankind is indicated to face world changes, and that education must embrace the philosophical and the practical to have a chance in circumventing the catastrophes of population pressure, environmental degradation and wars (p. 339). He further asserts that "Since technological innovation creates new jobs as it destroys old ones, developed countries which do not possess a national system for training and retraining - on the lines of Germany's apprenticeship scheme or of Sweden's method of preparing discharged workers to learn a new skill - will probably find themselves more disadvantaged than they are now." (Kennedy, 1993, p. 340).

In the satire, "A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland From Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public" (1726), Jonathan Swift proposed to reincorporate surplus babies into the economy by using them as food for famine-stricken poor folk. Inspired by Jonathan Swift's essay, and by Paul Kennedy's socioeconomic ideas, I offer a justification for a (serious) proposal to reincorporate women inmates into society through education which will benefit them and which would also be fiscally responsible.

Firstly, we must consider that the deviant women in prison are a threat to society and to civilization as we know it (the 'Rogue Woman' syndrome). Secondly, rather than let them rot or ferment into an insolent, seething permanent underclass, why not exploit them for financial gain? They constitute the perfect population for a low-paying (or non-paying) labor pool in the global marketplace, and as disenfranchised members of society (albeit with rights to food, clothing and shelter), their lives are subject to government mandate. However, if we shrewdly plan for the best investment of educational programs, retraining must be geared toward the highest net gains and long-term returns.

In the electronic age, general keyboarding and computer skills are in demand, creating a growth industry for data entry and data recovery. Thus, educational training programs geared toward the creation of a secretarial pool of low-paid laborers (the inmates) is a practical solution to the problem of marginal maids, keeping them busy and productive for the economy of the state. This solution is also symbolically palatable to neoconservatives, for the women are thus 're-feminized' into a passive, docile labor force consistent with female support functions in society.

While I make this proposal a bit tongue-in-cheek, it is also an attempt at a compromise between the philosophy of the new order, which, like it or not, appears to be underway; and of the philosophy of the social welfare order which acknowledged a responsibility to attempt social justice. Global economic restructuring is described as a necessary situation, with free-market competition as the only way for societies (if not nation-states) to survive into the 21st century. The proposal I have made is an attempt to meld a woman-centered approach of the more benign 1980s with the market-driven, globalization economic priorities of the year 1997. Ideologically, we are not always happy with the compromises we make, but certain cherished beliefs and ways can be salvaged, and the outcome can be a stronger entity.

Educational programming and social rehabilitation can be linked so that women in prison, who have broken the social and legal code in response to gender- and culture-based inequality, learn to utilize socially acceptable ways to fight back against their circumstances. After release from prison, armed with marketable job skills which put them on a par with other front-line workers in the service/technological industries, they may begin their reintegration within society by decreasing their dependency on crime or the social safety nets of welfare and other programs, and by establishing that they count in society (i.e. are economically productive). They can then possibly go on to change their circumstances and the system from within, particularly if the educational retraining programs contain courses on awareness of socio-political processes and how a range of positive choices and options are available to them should they wish to escape cycles of violence or discrimination.

" Education in the larger sense means more than technically 'retooling' the work force... It also implies a deep understanding of why our world is changing. ..Because we are all members of a world community, we need also to equip ourselves with a system of ethics, a sense of fairness, and a sense of proportion as we consider the various ways in which, collectively or individually, we can better prepare for the twenty-first century." (Kennedy 1993, pp. 340-341).

There is a need for a consistent, well-thought-out plan and policies for educational programs for marginalized members of society, including women in prison. As Currie and Skolnick (1988) point out, there are very concrete suggestions in research findings that economic and racial inequality, inadequate employment, and a lack of social and family support are important causal links for crime. Punitive warehousing and containment is a response, not a policy, for a policy should be more far-seeing, and more effective and efficient in its application. While activists and volunteers who rally against social welfare cutbacks are seen by more conservative forces as impractical in their demands for program funding, they are the people who are involved in the trenches, in the day-to-day realities of the lives of marginalized classes. Politicians who read reports and visit jail for a day are not immersed in these realities and problems. Viewing women inmates as justifiably marginalized and not deserving of services, and as societal 'dead weight' has a function in the neoconservative ideology of economic restructuring. These views form a rationalization for control of the entire citizenry, not just criminal offenders. 'They' have been eliminated from the competition for prizes in the new order, saving the goodies for those higher in the social order. We will not protest, because we are thankful that they have been eliminated, not us.

Conclusion

Darryl Steffensmeier, 1980 (cited in Faith 1993) demonstrated that low-income and minority women were effected by economic down-turns resulting in cutbacks in assistance and employment, and the same group was vulnerable to going to jail for theft or fraud. There seems a propensity for crime when economic opportunities are denied. Prison education has been identified as a "symbolic prop" in the rehabilitation of criminals (Thomas 1995) and is a contested site for neoconservative restructuring vs. the social welfare outlook. 'Getting tough' with criminals is the favored trend in social policy, resulting in an increased prison population, but little reduction in crime (Currie & Skolnick, 1988, p. 385). The 'getting tough' policy, incorporated with the 'less eligibility' principle is easily rationalized and enacted in times of fiscal restraint and debt reduction plans of major world governments. Thus prison educational programs, unless they can take on an economic rationalization to safeguard other goals (empowerment, entitlement) of education, will be dropped altogether, or else reflect the problems identified for the P4W: no relevant programs or services, limited access and the "absence of meaningful vocational, educational and treatment programs." (Arbour, 1996, p. 247).

"The results in terms of future levels of delinquency and crime cannot be precisely calculated. And many of these effects may not make themselves felt for many years. Like our policies toward health care and environmental quality, these economic policies raise longer-term questions about the kinds of legacies we will leave to future generations." (Currie & Skolnick, 1988, p. 384).

Elimination of historically-marginalized social classes from the emerging order is shortsighted. Reincorporation through relevant education and re-training is a more positivist and long-term approach. Through empowerment, naming their situation and understanding choices, women and men who have chosen to transgress the laws of the land can discover a place for themselves in society. The powerful socializing force of feeling needed, of having a recognizable purpose and function in society, has been previously denied to marginalized people, who as criminals, established themselves in the only niche offered to them. These criminal people need constructive changes in the social order. Warehousing them until they have 'done the time', keeping them off the streets, is not oriented toward reincorporation of marginalized women and men. Beth Richie notes, from her interviews with the battered black women at Rikers Island, that arrest and incarceration results in degradation, loss of autonomy, further marginalization and stigmatization, alienation, dependency and humiliation. Some inmates may 'learn their lesson' from this experience and vow not to offend again; others will vow to become smarter and more desperate in how they enact their crimes, so as not to get caught next time; and the vast majority will become further demoralized and non-motivated to improve their lives. Education programs in prisons, along with the delivery of other social programs (which generally are educative in one sense or another), are a means to counteract the despair and continued cycle of revolt against the system. Having "them" identify with "the system" is a solution which should appeal to neoconservative ideology, and it must also be integrated with the free-market, capital-generating approach to attain symbolic credibility with the policy-makers of the new era.

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